School Leadership Review

Volume 5 | Issue 2 Article 2

2010

Rural Principal Leadership Skill Proficiency And Student Achievement

Sue Erwin
Tarleton State University

Pam Winn
Tarleton State University

John Erwin
Tarleton State University

Jim Gentry
Tarleton State University

Mary Cauble
Tarleton State University

Rural Principal Leadership Skill Proficiency And Student Achievement

Sue Erwin, Tarleton State University
Pam Winn, Tarleton State University
John Erwin, Tarleton State University
Jim Gentry, Tarleton State University
Mary Cauble, Tarleton State University

Literature related to the rural principalship focuses on three challenges (Winn, Erwin, Gentry, & Cauble, 2009a): retention of effective principals, community relations, and pressure to meet standards with limited resources. While there is a great need for effective, skilled leaders in rural schools, recruiting and retaining quality principals is a challenge. Administrative stability, a factor related to student achievement (Partlow & Ridenor, 2008), might account for lower academic achievement in rural and urban schools (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Principal turnover rates in rural schools are comparable to those of urban schools (Bainbridge, Lassley, & Sundre, 2003; Balfanz & MacIver, 2000). However, rural principals are generally paid less, asked to assume a greater number of responsibilities, and face greater community scrutiny than their urban and suburban counterparts (Winn et al., 2009a, 2009b; Arnold, Gaddy, & Dean, 2004). Community resistance, geographic isolation, and economic shortages also create difficulties when rural principals implement special education services (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). The demands of finding and retaining highly qualified teachers (HQT), who can teach multiple subjects and assure adequate yearly progress (AYP) for students in special education, add to the challenges of rural administrators (Mitchem, Kossar, & Ludlow 2006; Jimerson, 2005). Furthermore, community resistance and lack of population diversity often impede the efforts to implement multicultural education in rural schools (McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2004).

Leadership and Rural School Success

As noted by Winn, et al. (2009a), twenty five years of educational research (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Lesotte, 1992, 1991; Reynolds, 1990; Edmonds, 1979), establishes quality school leadership is essential for rural public school success. School leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Furthermore, countries worldwide have recognized that as school administrator responsibilities expand, the need to cultivate school leadership increases (Olson, 2008). Among rural principals, unique community characteristics may also require different leadership skills.

Purpose of the Study

Warren and Peel (2005) found that rural schools can effectively develop focused leadership support and training. However, as indicated by Arnold, et al. (2004), the knowledge and skills most critical to effective rural administration have yet to be identified. Targeting specific leadership skills related to student achievement might focus university principal preparation programs and public school district staff development programs on producing more effective rural leadership. Ultimately, this emphasis may improve student achievement and school performance in rural schools.

Because of the importance of developing highly skilled rural school leaders, this study will endeavor to identify the leadership skills of practicing rural administrators and determine whether these skills were related to campus student achievement.

Review of Literature

Rural School Challenges

Rural principals work in schools that are demographically different than those in urban and suburban communities (Winn et al., (2009a). Data collected from 2002-2005 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that a third of all public schools are located in rural areas, but their enrollment represents only one fifth of the nation's public school student population. Additional findings indicate that rural schools enroll a larger percentage of White or American Indian/ Alaska Native students and a smaller percentage of Black, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students than do urban or suburban schools. Likewise, a smaller percentage of rural school teachers are racial/ethnic minorities. Native English speakers are found in greater percentages in rural than in either suburban or urban schools. Economically, NCES found 38% of rural students attend moderate-to-high poverty schools as compared to 45% of urban students (Provasnik, et al., 2007).

Rural communities generally offer fewer educational opportunities for students. For instance, fewer rural students per capita attend prekindergarden classes and schools are less likely to have advanced placement, International Baccalaureate courses, or Internet access. Nevertheless, according to NCES data, academically, rural students outscored urban children on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments while rural students scored below suburban students. In addition, rural students' freshman graduation rate (75%) is higher than that of urban students (65%), but lower than that of suburban students (79%), while dropout rates in rural schools (11%) are higher than suburban (9%) and lower than urban (13%) rates (Provasnik, et al., 2007).

Rural schools receive a smaller percentage of revenue from the federal government, yet spend more per student than either urban or suburban schools. Rural schools are more likely to have a smaller ratio between students and teachers, counselors, social workers, and special education specialists. There are fewer serious student behavior problems per capita and a larger percentage of teachers report satisfaction with teaching conditions in rural schools. In addition, rural parents are more likely to attend rural school events and take their children to athletic events (Provasnik, et al., 2007).

Rural parents are more likely than urban or suburban parents to have completed a high school diploma as their highest educational attainment. On the other hand, parents of rural school children (as compared to urban and suburban parents), are more likely to expect a bachelor's degree as their children's highest educational attainment. Despite these expectations, NCES reports that only 13% of rural residents acquire bachelor's degrees (as their highest educational attainment) compared to 17% nationally (Provasnik, et al., 2007).

As the NCES data clearly show, rural campuses are unique (Winn, et al. 2009a). Because their roles and challenges are different, rural school principals may require specialized leadership skills that differ from those required of their urban and rural counterparts.

Principal Effect on Student Achievement

Studies in the U.S. from the last 40 years overwhelmingly support the notion that if a school has an effective principal, students are more likely to achieve academically (Cotton, 1995; Lezotte, 1992). A review of studies conducted worldwide (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) found similar results. In a definitive review of thirty years of research on the role of the principal in student achievement, Marzano et al. (2005) found both a practical and statistical significance in the relationship between student achievement and the quality of school leadership.

The importance of effective leadership is also recognized within the public school community, in spite of difficulty in identifying and assessing the composite required skills. According to Rammer's (2007) findings, superintendents recognize the crucial role effective principals play in the development of schools even though they have no effective means of assessing those skills in potential administrative candidates. Likewise, Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) report that parents and teachers believe principals make a difference in the achievement of students and the learning environment.

Findings from these studies suggest that even when it is difficult to discern which skills are requisite to effective leadership, there is little doubt among researchers or stakeholders that effective leadership positively affects student achievement.

Principal Skill Assessment

Review of research reveals that principal effectiveness is important, yet there is no consistent or formalized method for identifying the most highly skilled principals (Winn, et al., 2009a, 2009b). As noted in Rammer's (2007) study for example, superintendents' belief in the value of a particular leadership characteristic does not guarantee that they have available tools to correctly assess these skills in potential employees. Adding to the complexity of assessment, findings from a study of new principals (Daresh, 2007) suggest it is not until principals become comfortable with the management of the school that they begin to consider critical instructional issues.

New principals are likely to assess their own performance primarily in terms of management skills. Baxter (2008) posits this may result from university-based principal preparation programs that apply a business manager metaphor to public school administration rather than one of community leader and public servant. Adding to the complexity of principal

assessment, Anagnostopoulus and Rutledge (2007) found when schools face state and district sanctions for low performing schools, sanctions rather than best practice become the focus of school administrators. Additional findings suggest that, in this atmosphere, administrators are more likely to resort to top-down managerial skills rather than collaborative instructional leadership skills. Another disconnect from instructional leadership may result from fewer (from 15% to 5%) principals coming to administration directly from the classroom ("The Changing Face Of Principals", 2008).

The convergence of these factors does little to guarantee quality leadership or stem rural school failure. In spite of overwhelming evidence of the essential role played by principals in creating effective schools, measuring leadership effectiveness has not been adequately formalized either by rural school districts or by rural principals. The following study attempted to identify the relationship between the leadership skills of rural principals and campus student achievement as measured by state accountability ratings.

Method

Until July 2009, Texas principals were required to participate in a state-approved professional development performance assessment every five years. Records from one such assessment, Principal Assessment of Student Success (PASS), provided the data for this study (see Appendix A). One component of the PASS assessment required school administrators to rate themselves on leadership knowledge and skills (see Appendix B) identified by Thompson (1993) and adopted by the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (NPBEA). PASS principal self-ratings from 2006 to 2008 were used in this study to determine which NPBEA skills predominated among practicing Texas rural administrators.

In another component of PASS, sampled principals were assessed on the NPBEA skills by two person assessor teams recruited among veteran campus and central office administrators and university educational leadership departments within the state of Texas. Based upon evidence provided by principals (campus improvement plan, state accountability data, Adequate Yearly Progress, phone interview, teacher performance data, and student performance data), assessor teams cooperatively identified each rural principal's NBPEA leadership strengths.

Finally, to identify the relationship between rural principal leadership skills and campus student achievement, the top five NBPEA skills identified by sampled principals and their PASS assessors teams were compared within three campus student achievement categories as measured by Texas campus accountability ratings (see Appendix C; Academically Acceptable = lowest passing rate; Recommended = moderate passing rate; Exemplary = highest passing rate).

Participants

PASS data accessed from principal assessments conducted throughout Texas from 2006 through 2008 yielded records of 259 rural school principals, representing 41.7% (108) elementary, 24.3% (63) middle, and 34% (88) high school campuses (see Appendix D). Principals sampled represented campuses at each instructional level (high school, middle school and elementary school):

- Academically Acceptable (AA) with 53.1% (76), 28% (40), and 18.9% (27), respectively;
- Recognized (R) with 11.5% (11), 24% (23), and 64.6% (62), respectively; and
- Exemplary (E) with 5% (1), 0%, and 95% (19), respectively.

Unequal representation of schools at each instructional level (high school, middle school, and elementary school) within each state accountability level (AA, R, E) may be a limitation of

this study's findings. However, the dispersion of these data reflects the pattern of accountability ratings in Texas. Overall, rural campuses rated Academically Acceptable (AA) were associated with 143(55.2%) of sampled principals, the largest group, while rural campuses rated Recognized (R) and Exemplary (E) were associated with 96(37.1%) and 20(7.7%) sampled principals, respectively.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate principal and PASS assessor rankings. Chi-square cross tabulation tables were used to determine dependence/independence by school accountability ratings and principal's NBPEA skill ranking frequency counts per NBPEA domain. Only significant differences were reported.

Results

Principal Self-Rankings of NBPEA Functional Domain Skills

Sampled principals (n=259) ranked themselves on NBPEA functional domain skills (*Leadership, Information Collection, Problem Analysis, Judgment, Organizational Oversight, Implementation,* and *Delegation)* using a seven point scale. Ranks were categorized as Less Confident (ranks 5- 7), Confident (rank 4), or Most Confident (ranks 1- 3) and sorted by campus state accountability ratings (AA, R, and E) as seen in Appendix E.

Frequency count averages indicate sampled principals assessed their skills as Most Confident, rather than Less Confident, regardless of their campus accountability rating. Skill ranking levels (Less Confident, Confident, Most Confident) across campus accountability ratings (AA, R, and E) also manifested similar frequency count patterns per NBPEA skill (see Appendix E). With the exception of *Organizational Oversight* and *Information Collection* skills, each remaining NBPEA functional domain skill was ranked Most Confident per Texas accountability

rating (AA, R, E). Likewise, *Organizational Oversight* and *Information Collection* skills were ranked Less Confident among all campus accountability ratings (AA, R and E) as noted in Table 1.

Table 1

Differences among Rural Principals an NPBEA Skills by Campus Accountability Rating (AA, R, E)

NPBEA DOMAIN	NPBEA Skill	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident
Functional Domain Skills	*Leadership*			*AA, R, E*
	Information Collection	*AA, R, E*		
	Problem analysis			*AA, R, E*
	Judgment			*AA, R, E*
	Organizational Oversight	*AA, R, E*		
Programming	*Instructional Management*			*AA, R, E*
	Curriculum Design	*AA, R*	*E*	
	Student Guidance			*AA, R, E*

Domain Skills	*and Development*			
	Measurement and Evaluation	*E*	*AA, R*	
	Resource Allocation	*AA, R, E*		
Interpersonal Domain Skills	*Motivation of Others**	*R, E*		*AA*
	Sensitivity		*AA, R, E*	
	Oral and Nonverbal Expression	*AA*	*R*	*E*
	Written Expression	*AA, R*		*E*

*$p = .000$

Principal Self-Rankings of NBPEA Programming Domain Skills

Sampled principals ranked themselves on the NBPEA programming domain skills (*Instructional Management, Curriculum Design, Student Guidance and Development, Staff Development, Measurement and Evaluation,* and *Resource Allocation)* using a six point scale. Ranks were categorized as Less Confident (ranks 5 - 6), Confident (ranks 3 - 4), or Most Confident (ranks 1 - 2). Total count averages by ranking level per NBPEA skill were not unique and differed slightly within each campus accountability rating (see Appendix F).

Instructional Management and *Student Guidance and Development* were ranked Most Confident and *Resource Allocation* was ranked Less Confident across all campus accountability ratings (AA, R, E) while *Staff Development* produced universal Confident rankings (see Table 1). In contrast, AA and R campus principals ranked *Curriculum Design* Less Confident, while principals at E rated campuses ranked it Confident. Furthermore, *Measurement and Evaluation* was ranked Confident by AA and R campus principals, whereas principals at E rated schools ranked this skill Less Confident (see Table 1).

Principal Self-Rankings of NBPEA Interpersonal Domain Skills

Principals ranked themselves on the NBPEA interpersonal domain skills (*Sensitivity, Oral and Nonverbal Expression, Written Expression,* and *Motivation of Others)* using a four point scale. Principal rankings were categorized as Less Confident (ranks 3-4) or Most Confident (ranks 1- 2) across the four domain skills (see Appendix G). Total count averages by ranking level per NBPEA interpersonal domain skill differed little by campus accountability level. Chi-square comparisons between campus accountability ratings and NBPEA interpersonal domain skill frequency counts proved non-significant for all domain skills except *Motivation of Others* in a (2X3) cross-tabulation. Ranking of *Motivation of Others* differed between AA rated campuses and R and E rated schools; AA rankings were higher than the others (See Appendix G). Differences between the principal rankings and campus accountability ratings were statistically significant, X^2 (2, $N = 254$) = 22.157, $p = .000$, $\phi_c = .30$. The moderate/medium effect size .30 (Rea & Parker, 1992; Evans & Rooney, 2007) suggests 30% of the variance in principal ranking (i.e., Less Confident or Most Confident) of *Motivation of Others* could be accounted for by campus accountability rating. Principals who reported Most Confident rankings of *Motivation of Others* were more often from AA rated schools while principals with lower rankings were more likely from schools rated as R or E; the lower the campus accountability rating the higher the ranking of *Motivation of Others.*

NBPEA interpersonal domain skills garnered the greatest differences among principal rankings per accountability level. The only skill in this domain ranked consistently (Most Confident) across accountability levels was *Sensitivity* (see Table 1). Conversely, *Oral and*

Nonverbal Expression varied within each school rating (AA = Least Confident; R = no difference; E = Most Confident). Principal rankings of *Written Expression* also differed by campus accountability rating (AA and R = Less Confident; E = Most Confident). *Motivation of Others* found AA and R rated campus principals Most Confident while E rated campus leaders unanimously ranked *Motivation of Others* Least Confident (see Table 1).

PASS Assessor Ratings of Principal NBPEA Skills

Teams of two PASS assessors cooperatively rated the NBPEA skills of each principal based upon data from multiple sources. A total of 714 ratings were produced by 259 assessor teams (three skills per principal; see Appendix H). In addition, the skill of *Motivating Others* (found statistically significant by principal self-rankings) was not rated by PASS assessors. *Leadership* produced the largest frequency count from assessors (137) while the lowest frequency count was found for *Resource Allocation* (13), a difference of 124 counts (See Table 2). Skills in NBPEA's functional, programming, and interpersonal domains differed in frequency with 365/51%, 204/28.5%, and 145/20.3%, respectively. Functional domain skills netted greater totals than skills in the programming and interpersonal domains by 22.5% and 30.7%, respectively. Overall, within the functional domain, *Leadership* received the largest count while the highest counts in the programming and interpersonal domains were found for *Instructional Management* (57) and *Sensitivity* (91) see Appendix H).

Table 2

Texas Accountability Ratings [Academically Acceptable (AA), Recognized (R), Exemplary (E)] by Assessor Ratings of Principal NPBEA Skills (N = 259 assessor teams; 1=highest rating, 14 = lowest rating)

NBPEA Domains	Skills	(AA)	(R)	(E)
Functional Domain Skills	*Leadership*	1	1	5-7
	Information Collection	3	2	5-7
	Problem Analysis	11	9	8
	Judgment	8	5	3-4
	Organizational Oversight	4	4	2
Programming Domain Skills	*Instructional Management*	5	6	9-11
	Curriculum Design	6-7	14	13-14
	Student Guidance & Development	6-7	14	13-14
	Staff Development	12	10-11	3-4
	Measurement & Evaluation	10	12	13-14

	Resource Allocation	14	13	9-11
Interpersonal Domain Skills	*Sensitivity*	2	3	5-7
	Oral & Non-verbal Expression	9	7	12
	Written Expression	13	10-11	9-11

The five NBPEA skills with highest frequencies by campus accountability level were similar for the AA and R groups (AA = *Leadership* (71), *Sensitivity* (48), *Information Collection* (45), *Organizational Oversight* (37), and *Instructional Management* (34); R = *Leadership* (59), *Information Collection* (39), *Sensitivity* (36), *Organizational Oversight* (29), and *Judgment* (28; see Table 2 and Appendix H). Although ranked differently, both groups shared the same skills except for the exclusive skill of *Instructional Management* in the AA level, *Judgment* in the R level. Conversely, the assessors found the E campus leaders to be considerably different from the AA and R campus leaders with highest frequency counts for the skills of *Student Guidance and Development (15), Organizational Oversight* (11), both *Staff Development* and *Judgment* (8), while *Leadership, Information Collection* and *Sensitivity* followed with 7. While E campus leaders were noted for skills also exhibited by both AA and R principals, only E campus leaders demonstrated high degrees of *Student Guidance and Development* and *Staff Development* as rated by PASS assessor (see Appendix H and Table 3).

Comparison of Principal Self- Rankings and Assessor Ratings of NPBEA Skills by Texas Accountability Ratings

In order to identify the relationship between the leadership skills of rural principals and campus student achievement, NBPEA skills self-identified by sampled principals were compared to NBPEA skills identified by assessors within student achievement categories as measured by campus accountability ratings (AA, R, or E). Table 3 shows comparisons of the top NPBEA skills according to principal self-rankings and assessor ratings by campus accountability level. It should be noted that principals ranked their skills in subgroups determined by the three NPBEA domain groups, whereas assessors rated these 14 skills as a whole, not separated by domain. This difference accounts for seeming discrepancies reported in the frequency and percentages of E level principal ratings (see Appendixes G and H).

Table 3

Top NBPEA Skills: Principal and Assessor Ratings by Texas Accountability Ratings (AA, R E)

(AA) Principal Self-ranking	(AA) Assessor Rating	(R) Principal Self-ranking	(R) Assessor Rating	(E) Principal Self-ranking	(E) Assessor Rating
Leadership	*Leadership*	Leadership	*Leadership*	Leadership	*Student Guidance & Development*
Judgment	*Sensitivity*	Judgment	*Information Collection*	Judgment	*Organization Oversight*
Motivating Others**	*Information Collection*	Sensitivity	*Sensitivity*	Oral Expression	*Staff Development*

Problem Analysis	*Organization Oversight*	Instructional Management	*Organization Oversight*	Problem Analysis	*Judgment*
Sensitivity	*Instructional Management*	Problem Analysis	*Judgment*	Instructional Management	*Leadership, Information Collection, Sensitivity**

**Scores with same rating; **(p = .000).*

From the highest five ranked or rated skills, principals from AA rated campus identified only two NBPEA skills also noted by assessors as strength areas: *Leadership* and *Sensitivity*. Three skills identified from principal self-rankings but not noted by assessors as most proficient were *Judgment, Motivating Others,* and *Problem Analysis.* As previously mentioned, *Motivating Others* was the only significantly different NBPEA skill found between principal rankings and campus accountability ratings. Unfortunately, *Motivating Others* was not rated by assessors as part of the PASS assessment. Instead, assessor ratings identified *Information Collection, Organizational Oversight and Instructional Management* as AA campus principal strengths (see Table 3).

At campuses with R accountability ratings, assessors and principals produced similar ratings for three of five NBPEA skills, one more than for AA rated campuses. Three NBPEA skills, *Leadership, Sensitivity,* and *Judgment,* were reported most frequently among principal rankings and assessor ratings from campuses rated R; however, while principals identified *Instructional Management* and *Problem Analysis* as strengths, assessors noted *Information Collection* and *Organizational Oversight* (see Table 3).

In the category of E rated campuses, assessors named *Leadership* and *Judgment* as strengths, conforming to principal rankings. However, although principals ranked themselves highest on these skills, assessors disagreed. For assessors, E campus principals were strongest in *Student Guidance and Development, Organizational Oversight* and *Staff Development,* while also exhibiting *Information Collection* and *Sensitivity* skills. Other skills highly ranked by principals, but not by assessors, were *Oral Expression, Problem Analysis and Instructional Management* (see Table 3).

In both AA and R rated campus categories, principal rankings and assessors ratings were more comparable. The only unique skill noted among these groups was *Motivating Others,* identified by AA principals. With the exception of *Oral Expression,* the principal-ranked NBPEA skills in the E campus category were similar to those of AA and R campuses. However, E rated campus assessor ratings included two NBPEA skills not found in either AA or R categories: *Student Guidance and Development* and *Staff Development* (see Table 3). This suggests rural school principals from E rated schools exhibit different skills than rural principals from AA and R rated campuses.

Conclusions

Even though effective leadership positively impacts student achievement, discerning the requisite skills of effective leaders has proven more elusive (Leithewood, et al., 2004; Cotton, 1995; Lezotte, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano et al., 2006). In this study, the NPBEA domain skill sets provide a context from which to compare PASS assessor ratings of rural principals in relation to their campus student achievement as measured by state accountability ratings. Each NPBEA domain (functional, programming, and interpersonal) reflects a particular

skill set. Before the findings of this study can be adequately discussed, a deeper understanding of the nature of the NPBEA domain skill sets is necessary.

Functional domain skills (see Appendix B) comprise base-level management and organizational structure to supervise daily, routine campus business (e.g. to run the buses on time, schedule classes, or maintain order). Evidence of effectiveness is, typically, quantifiably measurable (e.g. attendance records, disciplinary referrals). Programming domain skills (see Appendix B) provide systemic campus leadership requiring holistic perspectives that incorporate but surpass functional domain skills. More complex and difficult to quantify, these skills enable principals to develop frameworks, design anticipated outcomes, implement ongoing supervision, set goals, and draw inferences. In contrast, interpersonal domain skills (see Appendix B) employ functional and programming domain skills, but are subject to individual perception, making measurement more difficult. For example, principals may perceive themselves to be sensitive while faculty members disagree. Nevertheless, these skills improve effective implementation of both functional and programming skills.

Overall, assessor ratings of AA campus principals centered on skills related to management (functional domain) rather than collaborative systemic leadership (programming domain). The top assessor rated skills of AA campus principals from highest to lowest were: *Leadership, Sensitivity, Information Collection, Organizational Oversight*, and *Instructional Management*. Of these, three represent functional domain skills, while the other two represent programming and interpersonal domain skills.

Top assessor ratings of R campus principals from highest to lowest were: *Leadership, Information Collection, Sensitivity, Organizational Oversight,* and *Judgment*. Of these, four represent functional domain skills, while one represents an interpersonal domain skill. Of the 14

NPBEA skills measured, AA and R campus principals shared three functional domain skills (*Leadership, Information Collection* and *Organizational Oversight*) and one interpersonal domain skill (*Sensitivity).*

Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge (2007) contend that looming state and district sanctions for low student achievement tend to adjust principals' focus on the sanctions rather than best practice. In addition, when faced with performance pressure, administrators are more likely to resort to top-down managerial skills rather than collaborative instructional leadership skills ("The Changing Face of Principals", 2008). Findings from this study appear to support these arguments insofar as principals at lower rated schools appear to rely on managerial skills of the functional domain. However, principals differed in two skills: *Instructional Management* (AA) and *Judgment* (R). Interestingly, *Judgment* noted for R campus principals, suggests that student achievement may be linked to rural school leaders' ability to make quality data supported decisions. While rural principals at AA campuses appear to be skilled collectors of information, assessors found that principals at higher performing R campuses make quality decisions based on campus data (*Judgment*). This lends support to the truism that schools may be "data rich, but information poor". Professional development aimed at expanding skills of information collecting to include quality data-driven decision-making might, therefore, stimulate improved campus academic performance. As reflected in *Instructional Management,* the process of data-driven decision making may be skewed during the search for excellence by threat of sanctions associated with accountability. Principals, especially those of lower performing campuses, may feel compelled to monitor instruction more closely during their search for management solutions. However, without the presence of *Judgment*, principals may collect extensive data on classroom instruction but still not make quality decisions concerning campus improvement. The most

frequently noted assessor ratings for E campus principals from highest to lowest were: *Student Guidance and Development, Organizational Oversight, Staff Development, Judgment, Leadership, Information Collection,* and *Sensitivity*. Of these, four skills represented functional, two skills represented interpersonal, and one skill represented the programming domain skills. *Student Guidance and Development* and *Staff Development* were found exclusively among E campus principals while other skills attributed to E campus leaders were also exhibited by AA or R campus counterparts.

Programming skills like *Student Guidance and Development* and *Staff Development* may account for greater E campus student achievement, especially if leaders supervise faculty through more effective communication (e.g. providing clear instruction, guidance, training, and performance feedback). Most importantly, two of the top three strengths of E campus principals fell within the programming domains in contrast to functional and interpersonal skills found among top three ratings of AA and R campus leaders. These findings support those of Baxter (2008), Daresh (2007), and Anagnostopoulos and Rutledge, (2007) that quality school leadership appears to improve student academic performance. E campus principals in this study demonstrated a more systemic, collaborative leadership approach than AA and R campus leaders who focused on top-down management.

Comparison of Principal Self-rankings and Assessor Rankings

Comparison of assessor rankings to the principals' self-assessment rankings showed wide variation; thus providing the most relevant study finding. Assessors' ratings for principals at AA and R campuses were similar with respect to skills, but not in the order of those skills. Four skills assessors found most frequently for AA and R campus principals were *Leadership, Sensitivity, Information Collection* and *Organizational Oversight*. Only *Instructional Management* (AA) and

Judgment (R) differed in assessor rankings of these principals. Regardless of campus rating, all principals ranked *Judgment* as their second Most Confident skill; whereas, assessors selected *Judgment* as a skill only demonstrated by R or E campus principals. *Judgment* by definition indicates "logical conclusions and quality decisions" were made. Although people in leadership positions might understandably believe they possess *Judgment*, as noted in principal self-rankings, PASS assessors established *Judgment* skills based upon authentic campus evidence. Principal rankings at all campus accountability groups indicated strong skills in *Judgment* , but assessors deemed principals at campuses with higher accountability ratings to have stronger skills in *Judgment*. Perhaps, geographic isolation (Arnold et al., 2004) reduces diverse solutions to problems in rural schools; however, it is not clear why principals at E rated schools outperform those at AA and R campuses. E principals might have exposure to broader leadership networks, thus broadening their exposure to problem solving strategies and programs.

It should be noted that of the top four assessor rankings for AA and R campus principals, three fell within the functional domain, while one fell within the interpersonal domain. In contrast, assessor rankings of E campus principals listed two from the functional domain (*Organizational Oversight* and *Judgment)* and two from the programming domain (*Student Guidance* and *Staff Development*). While in the functional domain, *Organizational Oversight* and *Judgment* require the utilitzation of perspective rather than managerial skill. Furthermore, the programming skills of *Student Guidance* and *Staff Development* require setting priorities, reaching conclusions, making quality decisions, and utilizing resources. This finding supports a need for professional development for principals that builds skills beyond those in the functional domain and into the programming domain.

Recommendations

As noted in the review of literature, quality school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in influencing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). More precisely, there is a need for professional development opportunities designed specifically for principals of rural campuses. Based on the findings in this study, rural principals who demonstrate skills in the programming domain tend to address campus instructional needs in a systemic manner utilizing collaborative leadership. Conversely, rural principals of lower performing campuses demonstrate skills in the functional domain supported by personal skills of the interpersonal domain. This supports conclusions from previous studies regarding the impact of campus leadership on student achievement (Daresh, 2007; Baxter, 2008; Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007).

Future studies examining principal attributes (i.e. gender, pre-administrative educational experience, leadership experience) that influence principals' skills might further clarify differences among leaders from schools with different student achievement levels. Furthermore, differentiation of principals' skills by campus level of instruction (i.e. elementary or secondary) might identify skills unique to student instructional level. Because *Leadership* was the top ranked skill by both principals and assessors, further study is needed to clarify the discreet skills that constitute *Leadership* and the degree to which these sub-skills vary among principals.

References

Anagnostopoulos, D., & Rutledge, S. (2007, May). Making sense of school sanctioning policies in urban high schools. *Teachers College Record, 109*(5), 1261-1302.

Arnold, M., Gaddy, B., & Dean, C. (2004). *A look at the condition of rural education research: Setting a direction for future research.* Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Bainbridge, W., Lasley, T., & Sundre, S. (2003, January). Policy initiatives to improve urban schools: An agenda. *State Education Standard, 4*(2), 42.

Balfanz, R., & MacIver, D. (2000). Transforming high poverty urban middle schools into strong learning institutions: Lessons from the first five years of the Talent Development Middle School. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 5*(1-2), 137-158.

Baxter, V. (2008). A communitarian framework for planning educational leadership preparation programs. *Educational Planning, 17*(1), 18-26.

Bennis, W. (1994). *On becoming a leader.* Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Cotton, K. (1995). *Principals and student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cruzeiro, P., & Morgan, R. (2006, Spring). The rural principal's role with consideration for special education. *Education, 126*(3), 569-579.

Daresh, J. (2007, Fall). Mentoring for beginning principals: Revisiting the past or preparing for the future? *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 20*(4), 28-34.

Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for urban poor. *Educational Leadership, 37*, 15-24.

Evans, A. & Rooney, B. (2007). *Methods in psychological research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hallinger, P., Bickman, L., & Davis, K. (1996). School context, principal leadership, and student reading achievement. *Elementary School Journal, 96*(5), 527-549.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980-1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), 5 - 44.

Jimerson, L. (2005, August), Placism in NCLB – How rural children are left behind. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 38*(3), 211-219.

Krovetz, M. (1999). *Fostering resilience: Expecting students to use their minds and hearts as well.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004) *How leadership influences student learning . A commissioned report.* New York: Wallace Foundation.

Lesotte, L. (1991) *Correlates of effective schools: The first and second generation.* Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products.

Lesotte, L. (1992). "Principal" insights from effective schools. *Education Digest, 58*(3), 14-17.

Marzano, R., Waters, T, & McNulty, B. (2005) *School leadership that works: From research to results.* Alexandria VE and Aurora, CO: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

McCray, C., Wright, J., & Beachum, F. (2004, Fall). An analysis of secondary school principals perceptions of multicultural education. *Education, 125*(1) 111-120.

Mitchem, K., Kossar, K., & Ludlow, B. (2006, Summer). Finite resources, increasing demands: Rural children left behind? Educators speak out on issues facing rural special education. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 25*(3), 13-23.

Olson, L. (2008, April). Lack of school leadership seen as a global problem. *Education Week,* 27(33), 8.

Partlow, M., & Ridenour, C. (2008, Spring). Frequency of principal turnover in Ohio's elementary schools. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 21*(2), 15-23.

Provasnik, S., KewalRamani, A, Coleman, M., Herring, W., & Xie, Q. (2007, July). *Status of Education in Rural America.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

Rammer, R. (2007, November, December). Call to action for superintendents: Change the way

you hire principals. Journal of Educational Research, 101(2), 67-76.

Rea, L., & Parker, R. (1992). *Designing and conducting survey research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Boss.

Reynolds, D. (1990). An introduction to managing school effectiveness. *School Organisation. 10*(2-3), 163-165.

Tredway, L., Brill, F., & Hernandez, J. (2007, Summer). Taking off the cape: The stories of novice urban leadership. *Theory Into Practice, 46*(3), 212-221.

The changing face of principals. (2008, January). *NEA Today*, Retrieved June 25, 2008, from MasterFILE Premier database.

Thomson, S. (Ed.). (1993). *Principals for our changing schools: The knowledge and skills base.* Fairfax, VA: National Policy Board for Education Administration.

Warren, L., & Peel, H. (2005, January). Collaborative model for school reform through a rural school/university partnership. *Education, 126*(2), 346.

Winn, P., Erwin, S., Gentry, J., & Cauble, M. (2009a, April). Rural principal leadership skill proficiency and student achievement. Paper presented to the American Education Research Association (AERA), Annual Meeting. SIG: Learning and Teaching in Educational Leadership. San Diego, CA.

Winn, P., Erwin, S., Gentry, J., & Cauble, M. (2009b, April). Urban principal leadership skill proficiency and student achievement. Paper presented to the American Education Research Association (AERA), Annual Meeting. SIG: Leadership for School Improvement. San Diego, CA.

Appendix A

Principal Assessment of Student Success (PASS)

Principal Assessment for Student Success (PASS) is a principal assessment that has been approved by the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) for principal assessment within the state of Texas. According to Texas Education Code (TEC) 21.054, all principals must complete an assessment in order to maintain certification. The overarching goals of PASS include:

1. To determine the level of knowledge and skills for the principalship that each principal assessed demonstrates.
2. To provide quality assessment activities relevant to the role of the principalship.
3. To provide purposeful and constructive feedback related to each principal's demonstration of knowledge and skills.
4. To provide opportunities for each principal assessed to be reflective about his/her level of knowledge and skills, as well as to his/her plan for professional growth.

PASS is based on three sets of criteria: skills, standards, and knowledge. The skills included in the assessment comprise 18 of the 21 skills identified for the principalship by the National Board of Policy Educational Administration (see Appendix B). The standards are the seven State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) Standards which are required by the state to be included in the assessment. The knowledge is a compilation of the Ten Components of Effective Schools, the framework components of Instructional Leadership Development (ILD), and the instructional processes from the Student Success Initiative (SSI).

Each criterion is measured multiple times in PASS through a variety of authentic activities within the assessment. PASS contains a self-assessment process, a campus component, a teacher component, and a student component. All activities are based on authentic data provided by the principal being assessed and are directly connected to his/her campus.

The assessment process occurs over a 30-day period. All online activities are completed within 16 days and are then submitted for assessor review. The assessors are given 11 days to review the online responses and conduct a phone interview with the principal. Each principal's data and entry is reviewed by two assessors. One assessor is considered the primary assessor and, in addition to scoring the rubrics for each activity, provides written feedback on each activity. The assessment also includes one, face-to-face feedback day in which principals expand on their previous responses with a state-of-the -campus report and a plan of action for a teacher in need of assistance. Each primary assessor provides up to one hour of verbal feedback to each principal being assessed.

Appendix B

Functional Domain Skills comprise base-level management and organizational structure to supervise daily, routine campus business (e.g. to run the buses on time, schedule classes, or maintain order). Evidence of effectiveness is typically quantifiably measurable (e.g. attendance records, disciplinary referrals).

1. Leadership: Providing purpose and direction, formulating goals with staff and setting priorities based on community and district priorities and student and staff needs.

2. Information Collection: Classifying and organization information for use in decision making and mentoring.

3. Problem Analysis: Identifying problems, identifying possible causes, seeking additional needed information, framing possible solutions.

4. Judgment: Giving priority to significant issues then reaching logical conclusions and making quality decisions.

5. Organizational Oversight: Planning and scheduling own and other's work so that resources are used appropriately and monitoring priorities so that goals and deadlines are met.

Programming Domain Skills provide systemic campus leadership requiring a holistic perspective that incorporates but surpass functional domain skills. More complex and difficult to quantify, these skills enable principals to develop frameworks, design anticipated outcomes, implement ongoing supervision, set goals, and draw inferences.

6. Instructional Management: Ensuring appropriate instructional methods are used to create positive learning experiences.

7. Curriculum Design: With staff, planning and implementing a framework for instruction and aligning curriculum with anticipated outcomes.

8. Student Guidance and Development: Enlisting the support and cooperation of diverse professionals, citizens, community agencies, parents and students to promote the growth and development of all students.

9. Staff Development: Supervising individuals and groups and providing feedback on performance and initiating self-development.

10. Measurement and Evaluation: Examining the extent to which outcomes meet or exceed previously defined goals, or priorities and drawing inferences for program revisions.

11. Resource Allocation: Allocating, monitoring and evaluating fiscal, human, material and time resources to reach campus goals and objectives.

Interpersonal Domain Skills employ functional and programming domain skills, but are subject to individual perception, making measurement more difficult. For example, principals may perceive themselves to be sensitive while faculty members disagree. Nevertheless, these skills improve effective implementation of both functional and programming skills.

12 Motivating Others: Creating conditions that promote the staff's desire to achieve campus goals and providing feedback, coaching and guidance to staff.

13. Sensitivity: Perceiving and responding to the needs and concerns of others.

14. Oral and Nonverbal Expression: Making oral presentations that are clear and easy to understand.

15. Written Expression: Expressing ideas and appropriately in writing for different audiences (Thomson, 1993).

Appendix C

Texas Education Agency: School Accountability Rating

	Academically Acceptable	Recognized	Exemplary
Base indicators			
TAKS (2006-07) • All students *and each student group meeting minimum size:* • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantage.	meets each standard: • Reading/ELA ... 65% • Writing..... 65% • Social Studies.. 65% • Mathematics .... 45% • Science ..... 40% OR meets required improvement	meets 75% standard for each subject OR meets 70% floor and meets required improvement	meets 90% standard for each subject
*SDAA II (2007)*All students (if meets minimum size criteria)	meets 50% standard *(Met ARD Expectations)* OR meets required improvement	meets 70% standard *(Met ARD Expectations)* OR meets 65% floor and meets required improvement	meets 90% standard *(Met ARD Expectations)*
Completion Rate I (class of 2006) • All students *and each student group meeting minimum size:* • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantage.	meets 75.0% standard OR meets required improvement	meets 85.0% standard OR meets 80.0% floor and meets required improvement	meets 95.0% standard
Annual Dropout Rate (2005-06)			

• All students *and each student group meeting minimum size:* • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadv.	meets 1.0% standard	meets 0.7% standard	meets 0.2% standard
Additional Provisions			
Exceptions	Applied if district/campus would be Academically Unacceptable due to not meeting Academically Acceptable criteria.	Exceptions cannot be used to move to a rating of Recognized.	Exceptions cannot be used to move to a rating of Exemplary.
School Leaver Provision for 2007	A campus or district annual dropout rate, completion rate and/or underreported student measures cannot be the cause of lowered rating		

(Texas Education Agency, 2007, p. 42).

Appendix D

Composition of Study Sample

Frequency Counts and Percentages of Principals Sampled by Texas Accountability Ratings and by Rural School Type (N=259)

	Academically Acceptable (AA)		Recognized (R)		Exemplary (E)		Total	
	Count %	Of Total %	Count %	Of Total %	Count %	Of Total %	Total Count	Table %
Rural Elementary Campuses	27 (18.9%)	10.4	62 (64.6%)	23.9	19 (95.0%)	7.3	108	41.7
Rural Middle School Campuses	40 (28.0%)	15.4	23 (24.0%)	8.9	0 (0.0%)	0	63	24.3
Rural High School Campuses	76 (53.1%)	29.3	11 (11.5%)	4.2	1 (5%)	.4	88	34.0
Total	143 (100%)	55.2	96 (100%)	37.1	20 (100%)	7.7	259	100

Appendix E

Frequency Counts and Percentages: Texas Accountability Ratings by Principal Ranked NBPEA Functional Domain Skills (N=259)

NPBEA Functional Domain Skills	Academically Acceptable(AA)				Recognized(R)				Exemplary(E)			
	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL
Leadership	25 (17.5%)	9 (6.3%)	109 (76.2%)	143/259 (55.2%)	12 (12.5%)	6 (6.2%)	78 (81.2%)	96/259 (37.1)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	18 (90%)	20/259 (7.7%)
Information Collection	56 (39.2%)	37 (25.9%)	50 (35%)	143/259 (55.2%)	46 (47.9%)	15 (15.6%)	35 (36.5%)	96/259 (37.1)	11 (55%)	4 (20%)	5 (25%)	20/259 (7.7%)
Problem Analysis	43 (30.1%)	19 (13.3%)	81 (56.6%)	143/259 (55.2%)	32 (33.3%)	19 (19.8%)	45 (46.9%)	96/259 (37.1)	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	11 (55%)	20/259 (7.7%)
Judgment	23 (16.1%)	23 (16.1%)	97 (67.8%)	143/259 (55.2%)	17 (17.7%)	11 (11.5%)	68 (70.8%)	96/259 (37.1)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	12 (60%)	20/259 (7.7%)
Organization Oversight	72 (50%)	22 (15.4%)	49 (34.3%)	143/259 (55.2%)	43 (44.8%)	18 (18.8%)	35 (36.5%)	96/259 (37.1)	10 (50%)	4 (20%)	6 (30%)	20/259 (7.7%)
Total Count Averages	43.8	22	77.2		30	13.8	52.2		6.4	3.2	10.4	

Note. Less Confident = (ranks 5-7), Confident = (rank 4), Most Confident= (ranks 1-3); =divided by.

Appendix F

Frequency Counts and Percentages: Texas Accountability Ratings by Principal Ranked NBPEA Programming Domain Skills (N = 259; n=254)

NPBEA Programming Domain Skills	Academically Acceptable(AA)				Recognized(R)				Exemplary(E)			
	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Less Confident	Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL
Instructional Management	24 (16.9%)	39 (27.5%)	79 (55.6%)	142/254 (55.9%)	15 (15.6%)	22 (22.9%)	59 (61.5%)	96/254 (37.7%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	10 (62.5%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Curriculum Design	60 (42.3%)	46 (32.4%)	36 (25.4%)	142/254 (55.9%)	52 (54.2%)	22 (22.9%)	22 (22.9%)	96/254 (37.7%)	6 (37.5%)	8 (50%)	2 (12.5%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Outdoor Development	43 (30.3%)	49 (34.5%)	50 (35.2%)	142/254 (55.9%)	22 (22.9%)	34 (35.4%)	40 (41.7%)	96/254 (37.7%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	8 (50%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Staff Development	38 (26.8%)	53 (37.3%)	51 (35.9%)	142/254 (55.9%)	24 (25%)	50 (52.1%)	22 (22.9%)	96/254 (37.7%)	6 (37.5%)	8 (50%)	2 (12.5%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Measure & Evaluation	48 (33.8%)	63 (44.4%)	31 (21.8%)	142/254 (55.9%)	35 (36.5%)	38 (39.6%)	23 (24%)	96/254 (37.7%)	6 (37.5%)	5 (31.2%)	5 (31.2%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Resource Allocation	67 (47.2%)	38 (26.8%)	37 (26.1%)	142/254 (55.9%)	44 (45.8%)	27 (28.1%)	25 (26%)	96/254 (37.7%)	9 (56.2%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (31.2%)	16/254 (6.2%)
Total Count Averages	47	48	47		32	32	32		6	5	5	

Note. Less Confident = (ranks 5-6), Confident = (ranks 3- 4), Most Confident= (ranks 1-2); =divided by.

Appendix G

Frequency Counts and Percentages: Texas Accountability Ratings by Principal Ranked NBPEA Interpersonal Domain Skills (N=259; n=254)

NPBEA Interpersonal Domain Skills	Academically Acceptable (AA)			Recognized(R)			Exemplary (E)		
	Least Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Least Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL	Least Confident	Most Confident	TOTAL
Motivating Others	56 (39.2%)	87 (60.8%)	143/254 (56.2%)	52 (54.2%)	44 (45.8%)	96/254 (37.7)	15 (100%)	0 (0%)	15/254 (5.9%)
Sensitivity	62 (43.4%)	81 (56.6%)	143/254 (56.2%)	32 (33.3%)	64 (66.7%)	96/254 (37.7)	6 (40%)	9 (60%)	15/254 (5.9%)
Oral & Nonverbal Expression	77 (53.8%)	66 (16.2%)	143/254 (56.2%)	48 (50%)	48 (50%)	96/254 (37.7)	3 (20%)	12 (80%)	15/254 (5.9%)
Written Expression	89 (62.2%)	54 (37.8%)	143/254 (56.2%)	60 (62.5%)	36 (37.5%)	96/254 (37.7)	6 (40%)	9 (60%)	15/254 (5.9%)
Total Count Averages	71	72		48	48		7.5	7.5	

Note. Less Confident = (ranks 3-4), Most Confident = (ranks 1- 2); /=divided by.

Appendix H

Frequency Counts: Texas Accountability Ratings (AA, R, E) by Assessor Ratings of Principal NPBEA Skills (N = 259 assessor teams)

NBPEA Domains	Skills	(AA)	(R)	(E)	TOTAL RATINGS	Total By Domain
Functional Domain Skills	*Leadership*	71	59	7	137	365/714 (51%)
	Information Collection	45	39	7	56	
	Problem Analysis	16	12	5	33	
	Judgment	26	28	8	62	
	Organizational Oversight	37	29	11	77	
Programming Domain Skills	*Instructional Management*	34	20	3	57	204/714 (28.5%)
	Curriculum Design	27	2	0	29	
	Student Guidance & Development	27	14	15	56	
	Staff Development	13	6	8	27	
	Measurement & Evaluation	18	4	0	22	
	Resource Allocation	7	3	3	13	
Interpersonal Domain Skills	*Sensitivity*	48	36	7	91	145/714 (20.3%)
	Oral & Non-verbal Expression	20	15	2	37	
	Written Expression	8	6	3	17	

Note. /=divided by.

Preparing Aspiring Superintendents to Lead School Improvement: Perceptions of Graduates for Program Development

Pauline M. Sampson, Stephen F. Austin State University
Betty J. Alford, Stephen F. Austin State University
Ralph L. Marshall, Stephen F. Austin State University

Changes in the design and delivery of educational leadership preparation programs are advocated in order to meet the needs of leadership for 21st century schools (Byrd, 2001; Cox, 2002; McKerrow, 1998; Smylie & Bennett, 2005). The changing needs of the 21st century, coupled with accountability standards and more diverse populations of students within school districts, create challenges for leaders who are attempting to increase student achievement (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Schlechty, 2008). Further, student performance demands have increased at the state and national level because of the No Child Left Behind Act (Wong & Nicotera, 2007). These standards have thus increased the emphasis of the administrator's responsibility to positively impact student achievement (Taylor, 2001). With the graying of the profession and the need for exemplary school superintendents, the preparation of school superintendents who can successfully lead school improvement is vitally important (Lashway, 2006). According to the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002), university preparation programs should seek current leaders' perspectives of critical content components and the processes to be used in the preparation of educational leaders who can lead school improvement practices and processes.

This qualitative multi-case study identified nine practicing superintendents through purposeful sampling in order to attain their perspectives of critical practices and processes of school improvement, recommendations for educational leadership preparation programs, and